With the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, Ever-Merciful.

AN ABRIDGED TRANSLATION OF IMAM AL-SHATIBI'S INTRODUCTION TO HIS *AL-I'TISAM* (BOOK OF HOLDING FAST)

Imam al-Shatibi's full name was Abu Ishaq Ibrahim b. Musa of Granada (*Ar.* Gharnatah) and Xativa (Jativa, *Ar.* Shatibah) in Andalusia. He was an expert in *fiqh* (law, jurisprudence), *usul al-fiqh* (legal theory), Hadith, the Arabic language and *tafsir* (commentary on the Qur'an).

He belonged to the Maliki legal tradition and was one of its Imams, although of course he shunned blind partisanship or sectarianism based on legal schools, as did all the great Imams of the legal schools (*madhahib*). Furthermore, as he states clearly near the beginning of his magnum opus in the field of Islamic Law, *Al-Muwafaqat*, his seminal and highly-influential development of the theory of *maqasid* and *maslaha* (Islamic law based on its universal objectives and public benefit) is actually a synthesis of the principles of the two oldest and complementary Sunni schools of law, viz. the Hanafi and Maliki *madhhabs*. This synthesis provides the basis for a holistic, unified approach to Islamic law that accommodates all the recognised *madhhabs*, rather than a divisive approach based on rigid and partisan *madhhab-ism*.

The Imam's date of birth is uncertain, but he departed from this world in Sha'ban 790 (1388 C.E.). His books include:

1. *Al-Muwafaqat*, his magnum opus in the field of jurisprudence and the legal theory of Islam
2. *Al-Majalis* ("Discourses from Gatherings"), a commentary on the Book of Buying and Selling from Sahih al-Bukhari
3. *Al-Ifadat wa l-Inshadat*, a treatise on literature
4. *Al-Infaq*, on the science of *Ishtiqaq* (the derivation of Arabic words from their roots)
5. *Usul al-Nahw* ("Principles of Grammar")
6. *Al-I'tisam* ("Holding Fast," i.e. to the Qur'an and the Sunnah)
7. A commentary on the *Alfiyyah* of Ibn Malik, about the Arabic language
8. *Al-Juman*, on history

He was thus an outstanding Andalusian Maliki jurist, best-remembered for his *Al-Muwafaqat*, a masterpiece in the area of *Usul al-Fiqh* (Foundations of Islamic Law). However, his *Al-I'tisam* is also extremely valuable, being the first comprehensive formulation of the principles separating Sunnah (the authentic tradition of Islam) from Bid'ah (condemned innovation), a topic much-misunderstood by Muslims and covered in a cloud of confusion.

The first few chapters of the book define Bid'ah and comprehensively refute the famous view of Imam 'Izz al-Din b. 'Abd al-Salam and his student al-Qarafi, who argued that the five categories of legal ruling, viz. *wajib*, *mustahabb*, *mubah*, *makruh* and *haram* (obligatory, recommended, allowed, disliked and prohibited, respectively), may be applied to the term *bid'ah*.

With the Name of Allah, Most Merciful, Ever-Merciful.

[AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION]

Praise be to Allah, Who is Praised in every situation and by Whose Praise every important matter is begun, Creator of creation for what He wished …

Blessings and Peace be upon our Leader and Master Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy …

[The strangeness of Islam]

To proceed: I shall remind you, O loyal friend, with an introduction before turning to our essential objective. This is regarding the meaning of the saying of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), "Islam was begun [or began] as something strange and will return strange as it was begun [or began], so glad tidings to the strangers!" In different narrations, the strangers are described by the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) as:

- Those who reform others when the people become corrupt
- Those who hold fast to the Book of Allah when it is abandoned and follow the Sunnah when it is extinguished
- Those who revive what the people kill of his Sunnah.

Strangeness characterised the call of the Prophets, whose people rejected clear evidences and miracles, and when they tried to argue their case intellectually, their people could only manage the blind-following (*taqlid*) of their forefathers. The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) strove against the enmity, boycott and persecution from his own tribe and relatives. Allah even revealed the concession of speaking words of *kufr* (blasphemy) under duress, and this is a clear form of strangeness. He who is ignorant of something, opposes it. Were they to have knowledge, there would be agreement and there would be no differing, but Predestination imposes upon the creation their situation, for Allah says, "They will not cease to differ, except those whom Allah shows Mercy." (Hud, 118-9)

[The rise of the innovation of sectarianism]

Eventually, Islam became dominant and remained upright during the Prophet's lifetime (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and afterwards during most of the time of the Companions, until the seeds of leaving the Sunnah were sown. Some people began to listen to misleading innovations like those of the Qadariyyah and the Khawarij, and all of this was towards the end of the era of the Companions.

Next, sectarianism continued to increase as foretold by the Truthful One in the hadith of the seventy-three sects and the hadith of following the Jews and the Christians, even down a lizard's hole. The latter hadith is more general than the former one, since the former one applies to people of sectarianism in the view of many people of knowledge, whilst the latter applies to all matters contrary to Islam. This is indicated by the wording, "even if they entered a lizard's hole, you would follow them."

Every party in a disagreement tends to call others to his position, for to seek followers in one's action and position is a natural disposition. Because of this, dispute occurs with the opponent and empathy occurs with the one in agreement, and from this is created enmity and hatred amongst the disputants.

Islam was originally dominant and its people in the majority [i.e. after it became established], so it was not strange. The successful Party of Allah was not weak before any force, so Islam remained upright and continued in congregation and harmony, with any unorthodox tendency overpowered. However, the harmony eventually gave way to the promised dissension, and the strength to weakness. Unorthodoxy became stronger and its numbers increased. The natural tendency of requiring others to conform, for there is no doubt that the majority is dominant, led to innovations and desires splitting up the mass of the Sunnah into sects and parties, and this is the Way of Allah in His creation: the people of Truth are always few compared to the people of Falsehood. "Most of the people, no matter how much you may desire it, are not going to have faith." (Yusuf, 103) "Few of my servants are grateful!" (Saba', 13)

[Return of the strangeness of Islam]

Thus did Allah fulfil His Prophet's promise of the return of the quality of strangeness to Islam, for strangeness only occurs if those people are absent or few. This is when virtue becomes evil and evil becomes virtue; when the Sunnah becomes Innovation and Innovation becomes Sunnah. Thus the People of the Sunnah become subject to retribution and persecution, as were the People of Innovation originally, out of the innovators' hope that the viewpoints of misguidance may converge. However, Allah refuses that these converge until the Day of Judgment. All the sects, and there are many of them, will not come together in opposition to the Sunnah in practice and theory. Rather, the congregation of the people of the Sunnah will always remain firm until the command of Allah arrives. However, due to the intense pressure from the deviant sects and their applying enmity and hatred in order to convince the people of the Sunnah to agree with them, the people of the Sunnah remain torn in struggle and defence against constant attack by night and day. By this does Allah multiply their generous reward and grant them tremendous Grace.

[Partisan, narrow-minded approaches]

We have already said that attempting to convince one's opponent to agree has continued throughout all times, and is not limited to a specific period. Thus, to each party in a disagreement,

- whoever agrees with them is correct, no matter what the situation, whilst the opponent is necessarily mistaken and guilty;

- whoever agrees with them is praised and fortunate, whilst the opponent is blameworthy and to be shunned;

- whoever agrees has travelled the path of guidance, whilst the opponent has lost himself in the paths of misguidance and deviation!

[The author's intellectual journey regarding this matter]

I have presented this introduction for a purpose, which I shall now mention. It is that I, and to Allah belongs all Praise, have not ceased, since the opening of my mind to understanding and my desire to seeking knowledge, analysing the intellectual and legal aspects of knowledge and its fundamentals and branches. I have not limited myself to one science as opposed to another, and have not concentrated on merely one type of knowledge as opposed to others, as far as time and place have allowed. I have given this the utmost strength from my essential nature. In fact, I have dived into its oceans like an expert swimmer and plunged into its battlefields like a brave warrior, such that I almost perished in some of its depths and almost lost my friends, by whose support I had managed to achieve what was predestined for me. Throughout all this, I avoided the words and censure of the critics, ignoring the obstacles of the obstructers and the blame of the blamers. This continued until the Generous Lord, Compassionate and Merciful, bestowed upon me His Favour and opened to me of the meanings of the Shari'ah that which I had not expected, and cast into my limited self [the certainty] that:

- the Book of Allah and the Way of His Prophet have not left in the path of guidance anything for another to say, nor any scope for another to transgress;
- the religion has been completed;
- the Greater Bliss lies in what these have laid down;
- the only thing to be desired lies in what these have legislated;
- anything besides the above is misguidance and slander, forgery and perdition;
- the one who holds onto the Book and Sunnah with both his hands has grasped the firmest handhold, attaining the goodness of both the world and the Hereafter;
- besides these two Sources, everything is dreams, imagination and speculation.

The correctness of the above was proved correct to me by clear proofs which left no room for misconception, so Praise and Thanks be to Allah, as He deserves!

Based on this, I strengthened myself upon walking on this path as far as Allah facilitated for me. I began with the fundamentals of the religion (*usul al-din*) in practice and doctrine, then with the derived matters based on those fundamentals. During this, I clarified what is from the traditions and what is from the innovations, and what is allowed and what is impermissible. I derived all this from the science of the fundamentals of the Religion and Law. I then imposed upon myself to walk with the Community (*Jama'ah*) that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) named "the greatest multitude" (*al-sawad al-a'zam*), as it applies to that upon which he and his companions were, and to abandon the innovations that the people of knowledge have unequivocally stated are innovations and actions contrary [to the Sacred Law].

[Decay of the tradition as it is replaced by custom and innovation]

During all this, I had entered into dealings with the masses, such as serving as khatib and imam. When I desired to walk upright upon the path, I found myself a stranger amongst the majority of the people of the time because their attitudes had become dominated by customs, and the original traditions had become mixed with the effects

of innovations and additions that had not existed in the early times, let alone our times! Many warnings have been related on the authority of the Righteous Predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Salih*) regarding this, such as:

- Abu l-Darda' said, "Were the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) to come amongst you, he would not recognise anything of that which he and his Companions were upon, except the Salat." Al-Awza'i said, "So how would it be [if he saw what happens] today?" 'Isa b. Yunus said, "And how would it be if al-Awza'i had reached this time?"

- Umm al-Darda' said: Abu l-Darda' entered angry. I asked, "What makes you angry?" He replied, "By Allah! I do not recognise anything amongst them of the command of Muhammad except that they offer the Salat in congregation."

- Anas b. Malik (d. 93) said, "I do not recognise anything amongst you that I was accustomed to at the time of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), except your saying: *La ilaha illallah*." We asked, "Is it really so, O Abu Hamzah?" He replied, "You prayed ['Asr] when the sun had set – was the salat of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) like that?"

- Anas also said, "If a man had reached the early Predecessors and was then to be sent today, he would not recognise anything of Islam." He then placed his hand on his cheek and said, "… Except this salat!" He then said, "The only exception to that, and I swear by Allah upon this, is someone who lives amongst reprehensible matters and did not reach those Righteous Predecessors. He sees the innovator calling to his innovation and the person of the world calling to his worldly matters, and Allah saves him from that. His heart yearns for the Righteous Predecessors: he asks about their ways, seeks their traces [traditions] and follows their path, so that he may earn a great reward. Be like that, if Allah wills!"

- Maymun b. Mihran said, "Were a person of the Salaf to be brought back to life amongst you, he would recognise nothing except this Qiblah."

- The father of Sahl b. Malik said, "I do not recognise anything of that which the people were upon, except the call to prayer and the prayer."

There are many other such traditions that indicate that innovations enter upon matters of Law, occurring before our time and building up over successive periods of time until now.

[The author's dilemma, and decision]

Thus I was in a dilemma, being faced with two options:

- That I follow the Sunnah, with the condition of opposing what the people had become accustomed to, necessarily meeting that which meets whoever opposes people's customs, especially when they claim that what they are upon, and only that, is the Sunnah. However, in this burdensome effort would

be an overflowing reward …

- ♦ That I follow the people, with the condition of opposing the Sunnah and the Righteous Salaf and thus fall into the category of misguidance – I seek Allah's refuge from that! However, I would be following what was customary and would be regarded as a conformer and not a dissenter.

I decided that salvation lay in the "destruction" of following the Sunnah, and that the people would avail me nothing before Allah, so I began to implement this gradually in some matters: it was then that the Day of Judgment was established upon me (or so it seemed), I was criticised widely, the arrows of blame were aimed at me, I was accused of innovation and misguidance and treated like the people of foolishness and ignorance!

This was even though had I sought a justification for those newly-invented matters, I could have found one. However, the prevailing narrow-mindedness and the dearth of people of intelligence led me to climb a difficult ladder and constricted a spacious expanse upon me. My saying this implies that to follow non-explicit texts in such a way as to agree with what is customary is easier than following the clear-cut texts, even if this opposes the early Salaf!

[Accusation of heresy for following the Sunnah and avoiding Innovation!]

Sometimes, they went to such extents in condemning my path that hearts should tremble at what they said, and they labelled me as belonging to sects that are outside the Sunnah – a testimony that shall be written, and they shall be asked about it on the Day of Resurrection!

- ♦ I was accused of saying that supplication (*du'a*) does not benefit and has no value, as is attributed to some people, because I did not hold steadfastly to a congregational form of supplication after the salat when I was serving as imam! Later, I will discuss how that is contrary to the Sunnah, the Righteous Salaf and the people of knowledge.

- ♦ I was accused of Rafd [i.e. Shi'ism] and hating the Companions (RAA), because I did not hold steadfastly to the specific mention of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs amongst them during the sermon (*khutbah*), for this was not the way of the Salaf in their sermons, nor did any of the reputable people of knowledge mention this as one of the parts of the sermon. In fact, Asbagh was asked about the khatib's supplication for the early Caliphs and he replied, "This is an innovation; it is not fitting to act upon it. Better than it is to supplicate for the Muslims generally." He was then asked about the khatib's supplication for the warriors and soldiers. He replied, "I do not see any harm in it when required, but as for including it in his sermon always, I dislike that." 'Izz al-Din b. 'Abd al-Salam also stated unequivocally that the supplication for the caliphs in the sermon is an undesirable innovation.

- ♦ I was accused of saying that rebelling against the rulers is permissible; the only reason they said this was because I did not mention the rulers in the sermon, for to mention them is an innovation: the people of the past did not

practise it.

- I was accused of adhering to hardship and hair-splitting in the religion. The only thing that prompted them here was that in matters of legal responsibility and fatwa, I adhered to the mainstream (*mashhur*) position of the dominant Madhhab. I did not go beyond it, whilst they go beyond it, and give fatwas in accordance with whatever will be easy for the questioner and conform to his desires, even if it is an unorthodox (*shadhdh*) position in the dominant, or any other, Madhhab. The Imams of the people of knowledge were upon a path contrary to this, and the issue is dealt with comprehensively in the book *Al-Muwafaqat*.

- I was accused of enmity towards the friends of Allah. The reason for this was that I was hostile towards some *faqirs*[1] who were innovators going contrary to the Sunnah, whilst styling themselves as guides for mankind. I exposed to the masses the real situation of these people who claimed to be Sufis but did not resemble the real ones.

- I was accused of opposing the Sunnah and the *Jama'ah* (Community), on the basis in their view that the Community whose following has been ordered, being the Saved one, is that which the masses follow! They did not know that the Community is the path upon which were the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), his Companions and those that Followed them with excellence: this will be explained later, by the power of Allah.

They invented lies against me regarding all of the above, or tried to do so, and Praise be to Allah in every situation!

[The Hafiz Ibn Battah's description of the disease of sectarianism and "labelling"]

Thus, I was in a situation resembling that of the famous Imam, 'Abd al-Rahman b. Battah the Hafiz, with the people of his time. He describes that himself, saying, "I wondered at my situation, whether travelling or resident, with those close to me and those far off, those who knew me and those who did not. I found in Makkah, Khurasan and other places that most of the people I met, whether they agreed with me or opposed me, invited me to follow what they were saying and to confirm it and bear witness to it.

- If I confirmed what he was saying and gave him permission in that (as the people of this time do), he would label me 'one in agreement.'
- If I had reservations about a single letter of his words or a single one of his actions, he would label me an 'opponent.'
- If I mentioned regarding any of his words or deeds that the Book and Sunnah have been related different to that, he would label me a Khariji.
- If I recited a hadith to him regarding Tawhid, he would label me an anthropomorphist.

[1] lit. "needy", term used by Sufis to describe those at the beginning of the Sufi path

- If it were regarding the Vision [of Allah in the Hereafter], he would label me a Salimi.
- If it were regarding Iman (Faith), he would label me a Murji'i.
- If it were regarding actions, he would label me a Qadari (denier of Predestination).
- If it were regarding Gnosis, he would label me a Karrami.
- If it were regarding the virtues of Abu Bakr and 'Umar, he would label me a Nasibi.
- If it were regarding the virtues of the Prophet's Family, he would label me a Rafidi (Shi'i).
- If I kept silent about the explanation of an ayah or hadith, only replying with ayat and hadith, he would label me a Zahiri (Exoterist, Literalist).
- If I replied with something besides ayat and hadith, he would label me a Batini (Esoterist).
- If I replied with *ta'wil* (interpretation), he would label me an Ash'ari.
- If I rejected the ayat and hadith [i.e. the questioner's understanding of it], he would label me a Mu'tazili (Rationalist).
- If the hadith were regarding traditions such as recitation [of al-Fatihah behind the Imam], he would label me a Shafi'i.
- If it were regarding Qunut [in Witr Prayer rather than in Fajr], he would label me a Hanafi.
- If it were regarding the [uncreated nature of the] Qur'an, he would label me a Hanbali.
- If I mentioned the strongest view amongst all the reports which people took as their position, for there is no prejudice or favouritism in legal rulings and hadith, they would say: he has insulted our integrity!

Further, more amazing than all that is they label me with whatever they wish of all these labels after studying traditions (*ahadith*) of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) with me! If I agreed with any of them, others would show enmity to me. If I compromised with them all I would anger Allah, Blessed and Exalted, and they would avail me nothing with Allah. Therefore, I am holding fast to the Book and the Sunnah and I seek the forgiveness of Allah, besides Whom there is no god, being the Oft-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful!"

This is the complete quote from Ibn Battah: it is as though he, Allah have mercy upon him, was speaking for everyone, for you rarely find a famous person of knowledge or outstanding personality who has not been accused of these matters or at least some of them. This is because desires sometimes permeate people opposed to the Sunnah; in fact, the reason for leaving the Sunnah is ignorance of it. The following of desires is dominant amongst people of dissension, and when this is so they accuse the person of Sunnah of not being from among its people! Further, they condemn his words and actions, attributing such things to him.

It is narrated from the Chief of the Worshippers after the Companions, Uways al-Qarani that he said, "Enjoining goodness and forbidding evil have not left a single friend for the believer. We enjoin goodness upon them so they insult our honour and find in that support from the people of wickedness, until by Allah, they have accused

me of grave matters and by Allah, I shall not cease performing this duty amongst them."

[Encouragement of reviving the traditions, for these are killed by innovations]

In this way, Islam returns as something strange as it began, since those who have been brought up upon it according to its original description are very few, and those contrary to it are numerous. Thus the signs of the Sunnah faded until innovations stretched out their necks and the masses found it difficult to distinguish the difference, so the prophecy of the authentic hadith became fulfilled.

When I was faced with all the condemnation after what Allah had guided me to, to Him belonging all Praise, I did not cease to follow up the innovations that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) alerted us to and warned us from, explaining that they are a misguidance and a straying from the right way. The people of knowledge also distinguished these and described a number of them. I did this that I may avoid these innovations as much as possible. Further, I did not cease to research the authentic traditions [*sunan*] whose light was almost extinguished by those innovations, that I may enable their brilliance to shine again by acting upon them and be counted on the Day of Resurrection amongst those that revived them. This is because whenever an innovation is introduced, a corresponding tradition is killed, as has been related from the Salaf.

- Ibn 'Abbas said, "Every year, the people introduce an innovation and kill a tradition, until Innovation will live and the Traditions will die," and "Whenever a person introduces an innovation, he leaves from the Sunnah what is better than it."

- Luqman b. Abu Idris al-Khawlani [son of the great Successor] said, "Whenever a people introduce an innovation, a tradition is taken away from them because of it."

- Hassan b. 'Atiyyah said, "Whenever a people introduce an innovation into their religion, Allah snatches away from their Tradition its like, and does not return it to them until the Day of Resurrection."

There are other such narrations of this meaning, and this is a known and witnessed matter, as will be explained later if Allah Wills.

Encouragement of reviving the traditions has been transmitted:

- Ibn Wahb narrated that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, "Whoever revives a tradition from my Sunnah that had been deadened after me, he will have a reward equal to that of all the people who act upon it, without this reducing their rewards at all. Whoever introduces a misguiding innovation, that Allah and His Messenger do not approve, upon him will be the sin of those who act upon it without this reducing their sins at all." This was also transmitted by Tirmidhi with variation in some of the wording but with the same meaning, and he said that it was a sound (*hasan*)

hadith.

- Tirmidhi recorded from Anas, who said: the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said to me, "O my son! If you are able to begin the morning and reach the evening without any grudge towards anyone in your heart, then do so!" He then said to me, "O my son! For that is from my Way [*Sunnah*], and whoever revives my Way [*Sunnah*] has loved me, and whoever has loved me will be with me in the Garden." This is a sound (*hasan*) hadith.

[Another dilemma: action or restraint?]

I hoped, by analysing this matter, to rigorously follow the path of reviving traditions and killing innovations. After a lengthy period of constant analysis, I gathered fundamental principles [*usul*] regarding innovations and traditions that the Shari'ah had established, and derived matters [*furu'*] that are extremely numerous but covered by those principles. These principles are rarely found in the way that became clear in my mind, so I inclined towards making them known and realised that it was important for others to learn them since they would remove the confusion that has arisen between traditions [*sunan*] and innovations [*bida'*]. This is because when innovations became plenty, their harm widespread and their evil ubiquitous, people became constantly accustomed to acting upon them; the later generations became silent instead of forbidding them, leaving generations behind them who were either ignorant or heedless of this obligation of theirs. Thus the innovations became as though they were established traditions, freely-legalised matters from the Lawgiver. Thus the legal became mixed with the illegal, and the one returning to the pure Sunnah became like one opposing it as mentioned earlier, and hence the different matters were confused.

In this way, the obligation to speak became emphasised for anyone who possessed knowledge regarding it. Rarely has a work been written specifically regarding this, and what has been written has not sufficient for these issues. Moreover, whoever enters this matter will have no supporters, being deprived of helpers, since the people of influence will not allow him to remain peacefully in the land, and will force upon him incapacity in spreading the Truth. All this happens after customs have settled firmly in the hearts. They will try to afflict the opponent with a terrible punishment, for he rejects the customs that have settled in the hearts and are circulating in practice, that have become a Religion by which people worship and a Law that is followed without any proof except the practice of fathers and forefathers, along with that of some learned Shaykhs, whether or not they were people of insight into these matters. They did not turn their attention to the fact that when they followed the forefathers and the Shaykhs, they were opposing the Righteous Salaf. Thus, one facing this matter would be following in the practical path of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz when he said, "Alas! I am dealing with a matter upon which only Allah can support someone. The elders have perished upon it, the young have grown old upon it, the dumb have become eloquent upon it and the bedouins have wandered upon it, until they have regarded it as a religion: they do not see Truth as anything other than it."

Similar is the matter that we are discussing [i.e. the principles of innovation and tradition], except that there is no way to neglect it. Further, there is no option for one

favoured in this regard [i.e. favoured with this knowledge], except to be resolved and determined in spreading it after attaining it completely. If the opponent dislikes it, his dislike is neither a reason for the torch of Truth not to be raised, nor for its lights not to be unveiled and shone. This is because Abu Tahir al-Silafi has transmitted with his chain of transmission to Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said to him, "O Abu Hurayrah! Teach the people the Qur'an and learn it, for if you die upon that the angels will visit your grave the way the Ancient House is visited. Teach the people my Way (Sunnah) even if they dislike it, and if you wish to not be stopped upon the Bridge [over the Fire] for even the twinkling of an eye until you enter [the Garden], then do not introduce anything into the religion of Allah on the basis of your own opinion." Abu 'Abdullah al-Qattan said, "Allah indeed gathered all of that for him: transmitting the recitation of the Book of Allah and narrating the Sunnah, whether people liked it or disliked it. He also avoided opinion, to such an extent that he would not interpret anything of what he narrated, to ensure complete safety from error."

On the other hand, Abu l-'Arab al-Tamimi has related on the authority of Ibn Farrukh that he wrote to Malik b. Anas, "Our land has much innovation, and I have compiled a work refuting them." Malik wrote to him, saying, "If you think that about yourself [i.e. that you are able to refute them], I fear that you will slip up and perish. Only one who is well-grounded and knows what to say to them should refute them, for they will not be able to be devious with him: there is no harm in that. As for anyone other than that, I fear that he will address them and err, so they will pursue his error or succeed in scoring points over him. Thus they will transgress and increase in their obstinacy upon their innovation."

These words would entail the likes of me to be cautious rather than bold, but the spread of this evil and action upon it, and the mutual assistance of its people towards each other, entail those who have been favoured in this matter to be bold rather than restrained, for innovations have become common and their steeds gallop with no one to meet them head-on.

Ibn Waddah has related from more than one person that Asad b. Musa wrote to Asad b. al-Furat, "Know, O my brother, that what has caused me to write to you is the rejection shown by the people of your land towards the righteousness that Allah has bestowed upon you of justice towards the people, your beautiful situation in what you manifest of the Sunnah, your criticism of the People of Innovation and your constant mention of them and attacks upon them. Thus Allah has suppressed them by you and strengthened the spine of the People of the Sunnah. He strengthened them against the People of Innovation by exposing the faults of the latter and attacking them. Thus did Allah humiliate the latter, who had to hide away with their innovation. Therefore, O my brother, receive the glad tidings of the reward of Allah, and regard this as some of the best of your good deeds, better than [voluntary] Prayer, Fasting, Hajj and Jihad, for where are these actions compared to establishment of the Book of Allah and revival of the Way (Sunnah) of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace)? The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) has said, 'Whoever revives any of my Way (Sunnah), I and he will be in the Garden like these two,' and he brought two of his fingers together. He also said, 'Any caller that calls to this [the Sunnah] and is followed upon it, he will have the likes of the reward of all those who follow him until the Day of Resurrection.' So who will

attain, O my brother, the likes of this with some of his deeds?! It is also said, 'For every innovation by which Islam is plotted against, Allah has a Friend of Allah who defends it [Islam], and speaks by its symbols.' Therefore, take advantage of this bounty, O my brother, and be among its people, for when the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) sent Mu'adh to Yemen he advised him and said, 'That Allah guides one person by you is better for you than such-and-such …' and emphasised this matter, so take advantage of it and call to the Sunnah until you have a close circle and a group who can take your place if anything should happen to you, and they will be the leaders after you. Thus, for you will be the reward of all that until the Day of Resurrection, as occurs in the narration. Thus, act upon clear evidence and good intention so that Allah may repel by you the innovator, afflicted, deviant and confused, so that you will be a legacy from your Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). Thus, revive the Book of Allah and the Way of His Messenger, for you will never meet Allah with an action comparable to it."

This is the end of what I wished to quote from the words of Asad, may Allah have mercy upon him, for they strengthen the side of action in this matter [of fighting innovation], along with what has been narrated from 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz that he addressed the people, and part of his speech was, "By Allah! Were it not for my reviving a tradition (*sunnah*) that had been killed or killing an innovation that had been revived, I would have hated to live amongst you in authority."

Moreover, Ibn Waddah transmitted that al-Hasan [al-Basri] said, "There will never cease to be Allah's sincere people on the earth from amongst His slaves, presenting the actions of the people to the Book of Allah. If these conform to it, they praise Allah. If these oppose it, they recognise by the Book of Allah the misguidance of the one who strays and the guidance of one who remains guided. They are the representatives (*khulafa'*) of Allah." He also transmitted that Sufyan [al-Thawri] said, "Travel the Path of Truth, and do not be disheartened by the small number of its people."

[The author's conclusive decision about this dilemma]

Thus, I was caught in a dilemma between the two approaches [i.e. restraint or action], so I further consulted some brothers whom I have placed in the innermost depths of my heart, and who serve as a medicine for most of the diseases of my heart. They opined that there was no doubt in the Sacred Law that this was knowledge that must be spread, and that it was undoubtedly one of the most pressing obligations of the time. Therefore, I sought goodness (did *istikharah*) from Allah regarding authoring a book that would comprise an explanation of the subject of innovations, its rulings and related matters of fundamentals (*usul*) and derived matters [*furu'*], and I named it *Al-I'tisam* (Holding Fast). It is Allah that I ask to make it a sincere work, and to make the shade of its benefit extended, not constricted, and to make the reward for the care taken in compiling it complete, not partial, for there is no movement or power except by Allah, Most High, Magnificent.

A PARTIAL LIST OF PRACTICES CONDEMNED AS BID'AH (REPREHENSIBLE INNOVATIONS IN RELIGION) BY AL-SHATIBI

The following are mentioned in *Fatawa al-Shatibi* (“Collection of Shatibi’s Legal Rulings”) [3]:

1. Congregational recitation of Surah *Ya Sin* when bathing the deceased before burial.
2. The practice of some Sufis of assembling in a *zawiya*, performing dhikr, singing and reciting poetry.
3. Congregational recitation of a *hizb* (prayer-formula), such as the *Hizb al-Bahr* attributed to Abu l-Hasan al-Shadhili.
4. Congregational recitation of certain books in mosques.
5. Congregational supplication (*du'a*) after the obligatory prayers (*salat*).
6. Insisting on completion of the recitation of the Qur'an in Ramadan.
7. Saying *takbirs* loudly on the eve of the 'Id prayers.
8. Shaking hands and embracing each other after the 'Id prayers.
9. Adding certain sentences to the *adhan*.
10. Gathering for seven days after burial of the deceased, reciting the Qur'an loudly in congregation. This was regarded by Shatibi as prohibited *ma'tam* (mourning).

The following are mentioned in *Al-I'tisam*, Introduction and Chapter One [1,2]:

1. Celebrating the birthday of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. (“*Ittikhadh mawlid al-nabi sall-Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam 'idan*” - “Treating the day of birth of the Prophet as a festival or celebration.”)

2. Supplication for the early Caliphs in the Friday khutbah

3. Supplication for current rulers in the Friday khutbah

4. Congregational supplication (*du'a*) after the obligatory prayers (*salat*)

References:

[1] *Al-I'tisam*, ed. Rashid Rida

[2] *Al-I'tisam*, ed. Salim al-Hilali

[3] Muhammad Khalid Masud, *Shatibi's Philosophy of Islamic Law*, Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad, 1995. ISBN 969-408-155-6